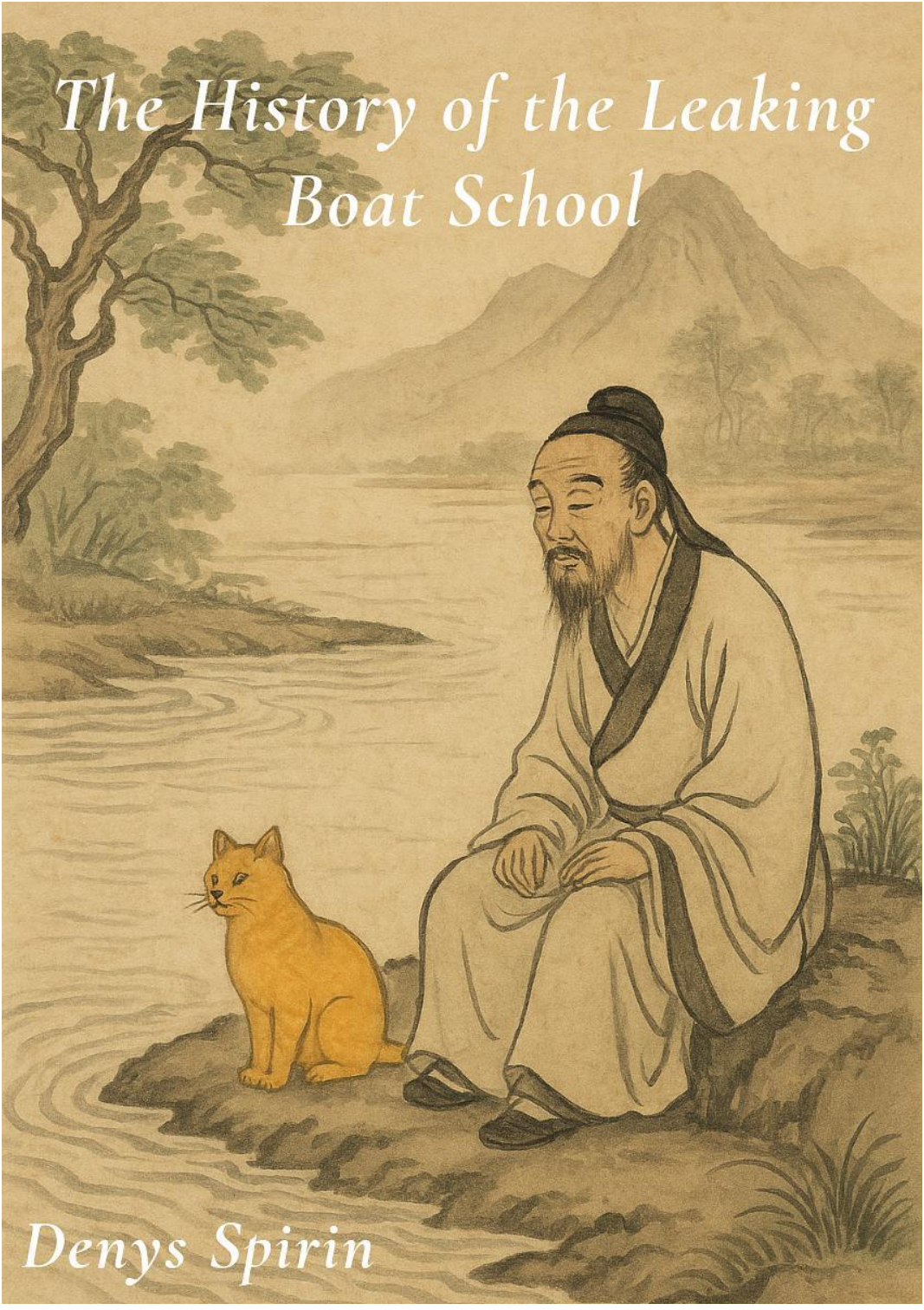
The History of the Leaking Boat School



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The History of the Leaking Boat School (Lòu Chuán Xuéxiào)

as Told by the Ancient Commentators

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To stay afloat, you must let yourself sink.

— great Master Zhì of the Lo-Huan School

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1

Foreword by the Reviewer

Some texts broaden the reader's intellectual horizon. Others raise more questions than they resolve. *The History of the Leaking Boat School of Lo-Huan* belongs to a different category altogether.

The origins of this school remain obscure. Its historical presence is fragmentary at best, and its teachings — largely absent from established records. Why, then, do its core ideas resurface now, after centuries of apparent disappearance?

The present work does not claim to reconstruct a lost doctrine in full. Rather, it presents fragments, speculative links, and veiled references — a constellation of materials that both illuminate and unsettle. It invites the reader not to accept, but to discern; not to interpret, but to differentiate.

What this study offers is not definitive knowledge, but a framework of potential inquiry. In that sense, it is not merely original. It is, perhaps, necessary.

智彼体

Institute for Eastern Philosophy and Textology, Beijing

2

Translator's Preface

The present volume contains the first complete translation of selected passages from the recently uncovered manuscript known as the *Lo-Huan Internal Canon* (羅環內經). Once regarded as apocryphal or purely allegorical, the Canon is now tentatively recognized by a handful of scholars as a fragmentary philosophical tradition centered on what it terms "the leaking boat as the figure of truth."

Unearthed during the restoration of archival collections in the lower Yangtze region, the manuscript presents a layered composition — part commentary, part oral transmission, part parable. The attributed teacher, Master Zhì (智), appears only in marginal records of the late Tang period, though never in direct connection with the text. Some suggest the figure may be fictive; others, that the fiction is the transmission itself.

The Canon explores the interplay between failure, perception, and the recursive dynamics of awareness. Concepts such as repair, drowning, and release are not moral judgments, but shifting frames within a fluid epistemology. What begins as absurdity reveals, through repetition, a precise cartography of letting go.

This translation remains necessarily incomplete. Several passages are only preserved through later Daoist citations or obscure annotations. Terminological difficulties abound. And yet, even in this fragmentary state, the Canon of the Leaking Boat speaks — not with authority, but with current.

Not a doctrine. A flow.

艾意

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3

The Student’s Enlightenment

Translated from the oral tradition of the Lo-Huan School (Lo-Huan Nei-Bi, Fragment 12)

One day, the great Master Zhì of the Lo-Huan School said:

“Truth is like a leaking boat.

To scoop the water is to become aware of its movement.
But if you stop scooping, you will see the boat begin to sink.
Truth lies not in the boat, nor in the water, but in the awareness of their interplay.
For every game is but xūgòu *(虚构) — a fiction you have entered.*
While you scoop, you are playing at scooping.
When you begin to drown, you are playing at drowning.
The one who becomes aware of the game may choose:
to scoop,
to sink,
or to step beyond the boat."

"But what if I repair the hole, Master?" the student asked. "A bit of flax might be enough."

Master Zhì smiled:

"If you repair the hole, you will be playing at mending.
But consider:
does a boat become itself precisely when it is left unrepaired?
And does a boat mended for too long not become something else entirely?"

The student fell silent. Water continued to seep slowly into the boat.

"Then scoop, you fool!" barked Master Zhì.

"See?" the student grinned, cupping water with his hands. "There *is* a difference in what game we choose!"

Master Zhì laughed, watching the student hastily bail the water.

"There is a difference — and there is none.
As long as you are playing, the game is real.
But once you step beyond it, you see you could have played another."
The student paused. The water kept rising.
"But the boat is still sinking, Master."

Zhì nodded.

"As do all boats. That is not the question.
The question is whether you are aware that you may choose how to sink —
or whether to sink at all."

The Submerged Daoist sat silently, chest-deep in water, observing the debate.

He did not scoop. He did not repair. He did not panic.

He simply *was*.

When the boat finally slipped beneath the surface, Master Zhì and the student flailed to stay afloat.

"You — you're not drowning?" the student cried to the Submerged Daoist, clinging to a splintered beam.

The Submerged Daoist opened his eyes, smiled, and said:

"I never sailed."

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4

The Registry of Drowned Students and the Index of Lost Boats

from the canonical writings of the Lo-Huan School (溺水學生普查和失蹤船隻清單)

This account appears in the principal work of the Lo-Huan School, *The Registry of Drowned Students and the Index of Lost Boats*, a collection of parables that follow those who tried to bail water, to patch the leak, to resist sinking, to accept it, and even those who never boarded the boat at all.

It is said that anyone who reads these words is already in the water. The only question is whether they are aware of it.

Within the School, students were traditionally ranked according to three stages of progression. The first were the *Frantic* (*dà jīng xiǎo guài*, 大驚小怪), those who, with determination and panic, attempted to seal the leaking hull. When a student came to realize the futility of such repairs, they would enter the next stage and become a *Bailer* (*wā chū*, 挖出). And if, in time, even bailing revealed itself as yet another form of postponing the inevitable, the student would become a *Contemplative* (*chén sī*, 沉思), one who simply observed the leak, the boat, and the process itself. From there, it was not far to mastery — and with mastery came the quiet transition into the School of Submerged Daoists.

Thus the Boat moved, and thus the students moved with it.

The Frantic clung to the belief that enough flax could make the vessel whole again. They ran along the deck, shouting instructions, comparing patching techniques, and composing tracts on repair. They debated materials, efficiencies, and theories of structural integrity, but the water paid no heed. It continued to rise.

Among them were some who, through clarity or exhaustion, understood at last that flax was an illusion. These students let go of repair and took up the bucket. They became Bailers — not to fix, but to delay. They embraced the rhythm of effort, knowing it would not save them, but finding meaning in motion. They refined techniques, annotated the *Treatise on the Bucket*, and debated whether it was possible to scoop faster than the water entered. But in time, they too found themselves submerged.

Then, the shift occurred. A Bailer would stop. He would observe the water, the leaking hull, and himself — and in that moment, he would release all effort. He would become a Contemplative.

The Contemplative no longer struggled. He watched, he smiled. He did not resist the water, nor the sinking. He simply allowed the moment to unfold.

And yet, something strange began to happen. Those who remained in contemplation long

enough noticed that they were no longer sinking — or perhaps that they had never been afloat in the first place.

In this final shift, the student quietly left the Lo-Huan School. There was no ceremony. He entered the lineage of the Submerged Daoists, where there is no boat, no water, and perhaps not even a self to remember having ever sailed.

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5

The Emperor's Boat

from the oral records of the Lo-Huan School

The Lo-Huan School was once nestled along the serene banks of the Yangtze River. Farmers from distant provinces would bring their boats to Master Zhì, whose reputation echoed for thousands of *lǐ*.

Master Zhì would receive each boat with a gentle smile. He would examine it in silence, nod with quiet solemnity, and without a word, set the boat back into the river.

"But Master!" the peasants would protest. "Your school is famous across the land — everyone says you are a master of boat repair!"

Zhì would nod thoughtfully, stroking his beard.

"I repair them as they should be repaired."

"But you haven't done anything!"

"On the contrary," he would reply. "I have freed you from illusion."

Some peasants would leave in frustration. Others would remain deep in thought. But a few stayed by the river, watching silently as their boat slowly sank beneath the surface.

These few, in time, became students.

水水水

One day, the great Emperor Ōu Péng (欧朋) came to observe Master Zhì. He stood for some time, watching the Teacher's methods, and then said:

"Strange. And this is what has made you famous? You do nothing but drift and drown your disciples."

Master Zhì turned to the Emperor, smiled, and bowed.

"Your Imperial Majesty, is it not clear? I simply show them that the boat leaks."

The Emperor frowned.

"But they know that already. They come to you precisely because their boats leak."

Zhì nodded.

"Indeed. They *know*, but they do not *realize*. They seek the removal of their problem. Yet if I patch one hole, another will appear. If I bail the water, it will return. If I teach them to swim, they will rely on me forever. But if I show them that the sky, the water, and the boat are one, they will no longer fear the leak."

The Emperor grew quiet.

He looked out over the river: the frantic students running across decks, the tireless bailers, and

the contemplatives who simply watched the water with the trace of a smile.

"So in the end, you are teaching them to drown?"

Zhì laughed.

"No, Your Majesty. I teach them to see that drowning or not drowning are but two faces of the same Game."

The Emperor said nothing. He stood for a long time, gazing at the flow of the river, before turning away in silence and walking back up the path, shaking his head.

It is said that the very next day, he ordered the construction of the greatest vessel in all of China. It was to be called *The Unsinkable*.

It sank on its maiden voyage.

水水水

6

The Legend of the Boat Zhēn (真的)

fragment 17 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

They say that far in the North, beyond the icy mountains where the winds speak no human tongue, and past deserts where thought itself begins to unravel, there drifts a vessel unlike any other — the Boat Zhēn, the True Boat, the one whose name is written not in ink, but in the breath between river and sky.

So vast is its body that no measure has ever held it; those who tried to walk its length were not seen again, though some say they simply continued walking. So steady is its bearing that no storm has managed to shake it; waves rise at its flanks to the height of ninety thousand *lǐ*, while the depth beneath it falls away into a silence no line can sound. So perfect is its form that not a single leak has ever been found — and thus, it has never known repair.

And yet the greatest mystery lies not in its dimensions, nor in its silence, but in the fact that no one remembers its origin. No name is recorded for the one who built it, and no history binds it to time. It appears not as a creation, but as something that has always been.

When the cold northern wind drives it down across the waters of the Yangtze, people leave their fields and gather on the shores, gazing at its passage as one might gaze at a dream that refuses to vanish with the dawn. Some point and shout with joy:

"There it is!

The boat without a leak!

This is perfection, this is salvation — the end of sinking, the promise fulfilled!"

Others whisper more cautiously, as though afraid that speech might fracture what they see:

"But who has touched it?

Who has seen it dock?

Does it not only drift, and never arrive?

Perhaps it is a mirage, perhaps only the river sees it."

And none have dared to set foot upon the Boat Zhēn.

When the students once asked Master Zhì what he made of this legend, he did not answer at first, but only laughed, not with ridicule but with something lighter, like the rustle of water against rotted wood.

"If the Boat Zhēn truly has no leak," he said at last,
"then it does not move.
If it knows no opening, it knows no passage.
A boat that is whole may float, but it cannot flow."

The students were puzzled, and one spoke:

"But Master, the people say they have seen it cross the Yangtze!"

Zhì smiled, the way one smiles not at a child, but at a wind that returns every spring.

"Perhaps it does not cross the river at all," he said,
"but remains exactly where it is.
And perhaps it is the river that flows through it."

That night, one of the students slipped away, wordless and unnoticed, and walked toward the North in search of the Boat Zhēn.

Some say he was never seen again. But others say that he found it. And still others say something different — that he came to realize what cannot be boarded, cannot be lost, and never needed to be sought.

水水水

7

Water as Sky

fragment 22 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

“Master,” the students once asked Zhì, “why is water like the sky? And why is the sky blue, though at times it turns grey?”

Master Zhì looked to the water, then to the sky, and then once more to the water.

“Are they truly alike?” he replied.

The student hesitated.

“They reflect one another, Master. Both shift. The water flows, the sky moves. But I do not understand… why?”

Zhì nodded, as though the answer were not something he held, but something that had been drifting nearby all along.

“When you look at the sky, you see blue,” he said.

“When you look at the water, you see the same blue. When the sky turns to rain, it becomes grey. And when the river stirs in storm, it too becomes grey. And then you ask, ‘Why does water resemble sky?’”

The student nodded.

Zhì continued:

> *“Water and sky change — not because they change, but because you do. If you learn to see the water as it is, and the sky as it is, you will no longer ask why they resemble one another. For then you will see that in them there was never blue, never grey — only what you placed there with your seeing.”*

The student stood for a long time in silence, watching the river. Then he lifted his eyes to the sky.

It is said that from that day forward, he grew quiet, and never asked another question.

水水水

8

The Truth of Xúnzhǎo (尋找)

fragment 31 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

“I have found the truth, Master!” cried the student Xúnzhǎo (尋找), whose name means ‘Seeking,’ as he bailed water from the boat with great fervor.

“The truth is that everything flows — the boat flows, the current flows, and we too, Master, we are flowing!”

Master Zhì looked at him with a gentle smile and gave a small nod.

“You are right, Xúnzhǎo. Everything flows.”

The student beamed, and renewed his effort with even greater enthusiasm, water splashing in arcs from the wooden bucket.

But after a pause, Zhì added:

“But if everything flows, then your truth flows as well.”

Xúnzhǎo froze. The bucket stopped mid-air, the gesture suspended.

“Then... the truth is unstable, Master?”

“If truth flows,” Zhì asked softly, “can it still be called truth?”

Xúnzhǎo let go of the bucket, and it disappeared into the water with a quiet splash.

It is said that in that moment, he ceased to be a Bailer — and became a Contemplative.

水水水

9

The Sorrow of Zhì

fragment 39 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

The mountains of Fùzhì (富士山) were veiled in mist, and the rains had fallen without pause for what seemed like days folded into nights, uncounted and indistinct. The surface of the Yangtze steamed with motion, beaten by countless drops, each one seeming to stir the whole river into a kind of waking dream. The Submerged Daoists, whose thoughts usually bubbled beneath the surface, now lifted their heads above the water, speaking in hushed tones, for the rain disturbed even the rhythm of silence, as if some unseen Voice had begun to speak in their place.

Master Zhì sat alone on the riverbank, unmoving, cloaked not only in soaked robes, but in something heavier. His students did not speak. They simply watched as he remained there, perched upon the rain-slick stones, water pooling around him, shoulders still, eyes unfocused, as though listening to something neither in the river nor in the sky, but in the space between. The heavens pressed low, dark and close, and the river beneath rolled with the weight of everything it had carried too long.

One by one, the Submerged Daoists raised their eyes to him, their words drifting cautiously into the air that was too wet to hold certainty.

"Why does the Master sit more heavily than the clouds?" one asked, not unkindly. "Did he not tell us, time and again, that all water flows, and in this, there is no fault?"

"But what if the rain never ends?" whispered another. "What if the river breaks its banks and there is no shore left at all?"

"And if even the floating ones begin to drown," murmured a third, "who will distinguish the current from the silence?"

Master Zhì slowly raised his gaze. He looked upon the churning water, upon the ridgelines of Fùzhì half-swallowed by mist, and upon the river again — not to study, not to reflect, but as one who has already seen, and now only waits for the image to settle.

"Yes," he said, when the silence had grown round enough to hold his voice, "the rain is natural, and the water flows as it must, and all things move from form to form." He paused, and the pause itself seemed to stretch across the river like a thread of thought too fragile to speak plainly. "But sometimes," he continued, and now his voice was softer still, as if he were not speaking to his disciples but to the water itself, "I wonder whether the boat has already sunk — and we are still sitting in it."

At this, the Submerged Daoists slowly slipped back beneath the surface, not in fear and not in reverence, but as if to return to the thought, to let it dissolve inwardly, undisturbed. And none of them rose again until the following dawn.

水水水

10

Scooping Sand

fragment 42 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

Once, Master Zhì journeyed with his students Sīwéi (思維, “Thinking”) and Rènshí (認識, “Knowing”) into the desert of Sāhā-Lā (撒哈拉), where the sky seemed fixed in silence and the ground offered no reflection. They walked for many days and nights, until the strength in the

students' legs began to falter, their breath grew shallow, and the dust of the desert clung not only to their faces, but to their thoughts.

"Master," they said with weariness in their voices, "we are accustomed to bailing water. But here, there is nothing to scoop. Our feet sink in sand, and our strength runs dry."

Zhì stopped and turned to look at them. The desert stretched endlessly in all directions, the wind whispering not of rivers but of erasure, and the sun burned above them without memory of clouds. There was no water to be seen — not a stream, not even a shimmer.

Sīwéi and Rènshí stood still, breathing heavily, the dust painting them the color of stone.

"Why are we here, Master?" they asked. "We trained to bail water, to face the flow. But in this place, there is no water to confront, no current to resist, nothing to scoop but emptiness itself."

Zhì nodded slowly.

"You say you have grown used to scooping," he replied. "But what is it that you do when there is nothing left to scoop?"

The students glanced at one another, the question echoing more deeply than the heat around them.

"We... suffer?" they said at last, uncertain.

Zhì allowed a faint smile to touch his face.

"Then it seems," he said, "you have only changed the game. Once you played at bailing — now you play at suffering."

The students fell silent, and the wind passed over them like a thought not quite yet spoken.

Rènshí looked out over the endless plain of sand, then turned to the Master.

"But if there is no water," he asked, "then there is no boat. And if there is no boat, what are we to do?"

Zhì crouched, took a handful of sand into his palm, and let it slip slowly through his fingers, falling grain by grain as if time itself were exhaling.

"This sand," he said, "is also water. It simply flows more slowly."

Sīwéi blinked, his brow furrowing not in confusion, but in the quiet stirring of a new kind of seeing.

"Then, Master... does that mean we may scoop sand, as we once scooped water?"

Zhì nodded once, neither encouraging nor denying.

"You may," he said. "But why would you?"

And in that moment, something opened.

It is said that one of the students remained in the desert, walking its lines without end, while the other returned to the river — but never again took up the bucket.

水水水

11

The Treatise of Zhì

fragment 51 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

One day, a student approached Master Zhì and said:

"Thank you, Master. Your stories are as instructive as ever. One could gather them all into a book that no one would ever read. That would make it valuable — like a diamond that no one has found."

He was a clever student.

Master Zhì smiled and replied:

"If no one reads the book, does it exist? If no one finds the diamond, does it still shine?"

He picked up a blank scroll and ran his fingers across it with great care.

"There. I have written it."

The students gathered around and peered at the scroll. Not a single word was inscribed.

"But Master," one exclaimed, "there is nothing here!"

Zhì nodded.

"You said no one would read it. I merely hastened the process. Now it is perfect."

After that day, one student began writing his own book, another stopped writing altogether, and a third left for the mountains and was never seen again.

Years later, in the depths of a forgotten library, a scroll was discovered. It bore no text, but was sealed with the stamp:

"The Stories of Master Zhì. Complete Edition."

水水水

12

The Yellow Cat

fragment 52 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

Master Zhì had a Yellow Cat.

The Cat ate, slept, and asked to be stroked.

The students whispered among themselves:

"What a useless creature! It doesn't even catch mice. It just eats Kun fish, sleeps, and demands attention."

One day, a student gathered the courage to speak:

"Master, why do you keep this Cat? It does nothing. It does not hunt, it does not teach, it merely sleeps and eats and purrs. Isn't that a useless animal?"

Zhì looked down at his Yellow Cat, who at that moment was stretched across a sun-warmed stone, yawning lazily before curling into a perfect coil. Then the Master turned and asked:

"And what do you do?"

"I study the truth," the student replied with some pride. "I practice bailing water, I seek the nature of reality."

"And what have you gained from it?"

The student paused.

"Wisdom... Suffering... Awareness..."

Zhì nodded.

"And the Cat?"

The student looked again. The Cat was purring, perfectly at ease, content in every muscle and breath.

"He simply is. And he is completely content."

Zhì smiled gently.

"Then tell me — which of you is wiser?"

The student opened his mouth, but no answer came.

It is said that from that day on, he began to spend much more time with the Yellow Cat. And some say that, in time, the Cat disappeared, and in his place remained a new Master.

水水水

13

The Submerged Daoists and the Final Shore

fragment 58 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

One day, several of the Submerged Daoists emerged from the water. No one knew why.

They simply began swimming toward the shore, stepped onto land, and disappeared from view.

The students of the Lo-Huan School observed this with silent astonishment.

"Master," they asked, "hadn't the Submerged Daoists already realized the truth? Why did they leave?"

Master Zhì only smiled and said:

"If a boat leaks, it has a hole.
If truth flows, it changes.
Do you not understand?"

But the students did not.

Many years passed.

At last, one of the Bailers chose to follow the path of the Submerged Daoists. He walked far, leaving behind the river, the damp air, the sound of water against wood, the boat, the School, even the memory of scooping. He crossed forests that whispered like forgotten parables, deserts that offered no reflection, mountains where even silence had weight — and one day, he came upon the Final Shore.

There was no water.

There were no boats.

There was no Master Zhì.

And then he understood.

He turned around and began walking back.

But it is said that he never found the river again.

Or perhaps he never tried to.

水水水

14

What the Student Saw on the Final Shore

fragment 59 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

When the student reached the Final Shore, what he saw was strange — not because it was hidden, but because it was absent. There was nothing there.

And yet, as soon as he stepped forward, the world began to appear.

Trees rose out of the void, their trunks forming in the space where memory and breath met.

The wind took shape from his exhale.

A shadow fell only when he began to think of it.

"So this is truth?" he asked aloud, though no one answered.

Then, before him, appeared Master Zhì. But not the Zhì he had known — this one did not speak, for every word gives birth to *xūgòu*, the constructed.

And the student understood.

"If I desire reality," he thought, "it will arise. If I do not, it will not. I can remain. I can leave. I can build a boat with no leak. Or I can allow myself to drown."

He stood still, feeling the full *shí* of the place — its suchness, its presence without name.

It is said that from that day on, no one ever saw him again.

But sometimes, when the Yangtze boils and the wind curves oddly at the horizon, someone hears a quiet laugh, far beyond the edge of the sky.

水水水

15

The Cat Who Neither Comes Nor Goes

final fragment from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

"All is xūgòu *— construction, invention, fiction.*
The boat is xūgòu.
The water is xūgòu.

You, reading these lines — are xūgòu.
But one who sees xūgòu *— is no longer* xūgòu.*”*

It is said that when Master Zhì first heard this, he simply nodded and continued stroking the Yellow Cat that lay beside him.

“Master,” asked the student Wǎn, “is your Cat *xūgòu* as well?”

“The yellow fur is *xūgòu*, the whiskers are *xūgòu*, the tail is *xūgòu*,” Zhì replied, “but as for the Cat itself... I am not so sure.”

The students murmured among themselves, uncertain how to take this.

Was not everything *xūgòu*?

Wǎn frowned.

“But Master, if the whiskers, tail, and color are all *xūgòu*, then what remains? Is not the Cat simply the sum of its parts?”

Zhì smiled gently, ran his hand along the Cat’s back, and watched as it stretched, yawned, and regarded the student with eyes full of indifference.

“If you put together a boat, the water, and the flow — do you have a river?”

Wǎn paused, gaze unfocused.

“No... the river is not just boat, water, and flow. It’s... simply the River.”

Zhì nodded.

“Exactly. And the Cat is simply the Cat.”

At that moment, the Cat rolled onto its side, closed its eyes halfway, and fell into sleep as if nothing had ever stirred.

It is said that on that day, Wǎn fell silent for the first time.

He simply sat, looking at the Cat, and something in his gaze changed — though no one knew what it was he understood.

Or perhaps what he forgot.

From that day forward, the Cat was known by a new name:

The Cat Who Neither Comes Nor Goes (猫无来去, Māo wú lái qù).

The students stopped asking about him.

They no longer said, “Where is the Cat?” — for he was always exactly where he was.

And yet, many years later, after Master Zhì had passed from the School, one of the students noticed something strange.

The Cat, too, was gone.

“Did he leave?” one asked.

“But he does not leave.”

“Then he never came.”

“Then he must have always been here.”

“But if he is gone... does that mean he ever was?”

They debated for three days and three nights — not with anger, but with the kind of slowness that comes when thought begins to forget its own shape.

At last, an old Submerged Daoist, who had not spoken since he gave up bailing, approached. He looked at the river, then the sky, then the empty place where the Cat had once slept, and said quietly:

“The Cat does not come.
The Cat does not go.

The Cat is simply the Cat.”

After that, no one spoke of the Cat again.

But it is said that on still nights, when the Yangtze flows smooth and the sky leans close, a soft purring can be heard — arising gently from the empty air.

水水水

16

The Treatise

final fragment (unwritten) from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

“When the boat floats — that is shí*.*
When the boat sinks — that too is shí*.*
But when there is no boat, and yet you still see the water — that is no longer shí*, but what stands beyond it.”*
— *Master Zhì*, The Treatise That Was Never Written

They say that *The Treatise That Was Never Written* is the most complete of all treatises.
It contains no words, yet it flows.
It teaches not by sentence, but by silence, by the movement of things as they are.
The students searched for it in the library of the Lo-Huan School, but found nothing.
“Perhaps Master Zhì forgot to write it?” one offered.
“Perhaps it was written, but washed away by the river,” another suggested.
“Perhaps,” said a third, “the very question of the Treatise is already *xūgòu*.”
A Submerged Daoist, who had listened in silence, closed his eyes and whispered:

“When the boat floats — that is shí*.*
When the boat sinks — that too is shí*.*
And the Treatise has already been written.
It is only that no one knows how to read it.”

And with that, he slipped back beneath the surface,
and did not rise again.

水水水

17

The Last Bailer

fragment with image from The Treatise That Was Never Written

This is an ancient Chinese ink painting.

It depicts a boat adrift upon the Yangtze, and a lone student of the Lo-Huan School, still engaged in the act of bailing. His body leans into the gesture. The water around him flows without resistance. His hand lifts, pours, repeats.

Is he one who has already seen *xūgòu* for what it is?

Or is he still on the path toward Contemplation?

Some say that somewhere on the bank, hidden by mist and old reeds, Master Zhì is watching — stroking the Cat Who Neither Comes Nor Goes.

Perhaps this painting is not merely a record.

Perhaps it is the only surviving portion of *The Treatise That Was Never Written*,

transcribed not in characters, but in brushstrokes

水水水.

They say that on the Yangtze, there remained one man who still bailed water from his boat. The boat was old, the water entered slowly but without end. He bailed without haste and without pause. His bucket was cracked, his clothes soaked, his hands worn smooth from the motion. He did not look at the sky, nor at the riverbanks. He simply bailed.

The Submerged Daoists rose from below. One asked him, “Why do you bail? Your boat leaks, and always will.”

The old man did not look up. “If I don’t bail, I sink.”

Another Daoist said, “But eventually the water will rise. What difference does it make?”

The old man poured out another bucket. “Are you sure I’m trying to make a difference?”

They watched him in silence. Around them were other boats, abandoned, sunken, forgotten. His was the only one still afloat.

A younger Daoist finally asked, “What if you stopped bailing, and didn’t sink?”

For the first time, the man raised his eyes. He looked at the Daoist, then at the water, then at his own hand, still holding the bucket. He inhaled. And lowered the bucket again.

Some say that after that day, he joined the Submerged Ones.

Others say the boat stopped leaking.

Still others say there was never a boat.

水水水

18

The Boat Paradox

fragment of classic instruction, Lo-Huan School

A well-known paradox in the Lo-Huan School asks:

"If you find a boat at the bottom, is it still afloat — or has it sunk?"

When the students brought this question to Master Zhì, he smiled and said:

"If you found it at the bottom, then you yourself are at the bottom. So who has sunk — the boat, or you?"

One student thought for a moment and replied:

"But if I can see the boat, then I have not drowned — I am only underwater. Perhaps the boat also has not sunk, but simply ended up where it could be found."

Zhì nodded.

"If the boat is at the bottom, it no longer sinks.

If you are at the bottom, you no longer fall.

So where is the boundary between floating and drowning?"

Then a Submerged Daoist, who had been listening in silence, whispered:

"If the boat has sunk, but you can see it — then it still floats. Just not where you expected."

They say that on that day, several students stepped into the river and did not return.

But sometimes, if you dive deep beneath the surface of the Yangtze,

you may glimpse a boat that neither floats nor sinks —

it simply is.

水水水

19

The River

(fragment without origin, found between chapters)

At first, the river simply was. No one asked questions, no one divided it, no one looked for meaning within it. It just flowed.

Then came the first Student, who said: “The boat is not the river, and the river is not the boat.” And thus, duality began.

Another Student came and said: “The boat and the river are one — the boat flows with the river.” And so appeared the Boat Flowing With the River.

But soon others arrived. They began to ask: “What about the shore? Isn’t it part of the boat as well?” “And what of the Submerged Daoists — don’t they also move with the boat?” “And what of us — do we not flow just as the river does?”

They began to divide — the shore from the river, the boat from the water, the teacher from the students, the self from the not-self. They constructed dichotomies, and then trichotomies, and then tetracotomies. They denied, and synthesized, and denied again, and transcended. They searched for a new quality, a new integration, a new path.

But each time they believed they had found a final answer, the river continued to flow.

At last, one of the students turned to Master Zhì and asked, “Master, what came first — the Boat, the River, the Shore, or Us?”

Zhì dipped his hand into the water and slowly poured it back into the river.

“At first, the river simply was.”

They say that after those words, the students stopped arguing.

But the river still flows.

水水水

20

Mentions of the School of the Leaking Boat

Lòu chuán xuéxiào (漏船學校) (in fragments from classical Chinese writings)

"Dao De Jing" (道德经, Dàodé Jīng, 4th century BCE)

> *"Water flows and does not argue.*
> *Great sages follow water.*
> *But one who has drowned no longer speaks of the current.*
> *He flows, like the Dao."*

It is said this verse was erased from later manuscripts by rivals of the School.

"Zhuangzi" (莊子, Zhuāngzǐ, 4th–3rd century BCE)

> *"I saw a man building a boat,*
> *but fearing leaks, he left it ashore.*
> *I saw another — he had no fear, yet the boat still sank.*
> *I saw a third — he became the water itself."*

A later commentator claimed Zhuangzi wrote this on clay tablets, but they dissolved in the rain.

"I Ching" (易經, Yì Jīng, Book of Changes, ca. 12th–7th century BCE)

> *"The sign of water bears two meanings.*
> *Water gives life, but also takes it in.*
> *The boat is a choice.*
> *He who remains on shore does not sail.*
> *He who sails knows he will one day sink.*
> *He who sinks becomes the river."*

This passage was reportedly lost when the ink washed away during a journey along the Yangtze.

"Huainanzi" (淮南子, Huáinánzǐ, 2nd century BCE)

> *"The Master asked:*
> *'What happens if you throw a book into the river?'*
> *The student replied:*
> *'It gets wet and disappears.'*

The Master said:
‘Then you understand what happened to all the great texts.’”

After reading this, the Submerged Daoists ceased writing books.

“Baopuzi” (抱朴子, Bàopǔzǐ, 3rd–4th century CE)

“We sought the Submerged Daoist.
Some said he was in the river.
Others — in the sea.
A few claimed he had climbed out, and now laughs at us from the shore.
None imagined he was the current itself.”

The author never finished this entry — the boat he was writing in sank before he could.

水水水

21

Water in the Hand

(paradox of the Great Zhì)

The Great Paradox of Zhì says:

"You hold truth in your hand, like water.
Clench your fist — and it escapes.
Open your palm — and it stays with you."

One day, a student asked Master Zhì,
"Master, what does this mean? Can truth really remain in one's palm?"
Zhì reached down to the river and filled his hand with water.
"Watch," he said.
He closed his fist, and the water slipped through his fingers.
Then he opened his hand — and a thin film of moisture remained, glimmering in the sunlight.
"When you try to grasp truth, it escapes.
When you allow it to be, it remains with you."
The student thought for a while.
"But Master, even if I leave the water in my palm — it will still evaporate."
Zhì nodded.

"That is why no one possesses truth forever."

They say that after hearing this, the student lowered his hand into the water
and never raised it again.
And the Yangtze flowed, just as it always had.

水水水

22

The First Scholarly Work on the School of the Leaking Boat Lòu chuán xuéxiào (漏船學校)

The treatise *"Philosophy of the Leaking Boat: Between Fixation and Flow"* is attributed to a little-known thinker by the name of *Lùn-Wén (論文)*, whose very name — meaning "treatise" — has led some scholars to question whether he ever existed, or was merely the embodiment of academic desire.

Lùn-Wén was the first to attempt a systematic analysis of the teachings of the School of the Leaking Boat (Lòu chuán xuéxiào). Predictably, the very act of systematizing disrupted what it sought to capture. The result was a document that appears less as a doctrine and more as a sequence of dissolving questions, each eroding the previous like water through paper.

Core Questions of the Treatise:

*How is the concept of leakage (*tòu, 漏*) related to the notion of truth?*

If truth is what flows, does tap water count as truth?

If bailing creates leakage, does that make the Bailer the origin of all that exists?

Why does the boat inevitably leak, and what does this suggest about the xūgòu *(虛构, fictive) nature of reality?*

If all is xūgòu*, yet still flows — does that mean* xūgòu *cannot help but leak?*

Is leakage without fiction possible, or does every attempt at patching become a new form of xūgòu*?*

If caulking is xūgòu*, is it equivalent to bailing?*

Is it possible to construct a boat that neither rests on shore nor sinks?

Might the School of Lo-Huan itself be such a boat?

Can the Submerged Daoist be considered a boat?

Is Master Zhì the flow itself, or merely the bucket?

Did the ideas of the Leaking Boat influence late Daoist thought?

What is the relation between leakage and Dao *(道)?*

Is the Yellow Cat a living metaphor for Dao in the Dao De Jing*?*

Was Zhuangzi a secret disciple of Lo-Huan?

*Why did the Submerged Daoists (*Shuǐjīng Dào*, 水经道) disappear? Can a Submerged Daoist drown?*

The treatise was not well received. Many scholars claimed the School of the Leaking Boat never existed, and that the notion of "leaking truth" was too radical, branding it a form of *radical*

xūgòuism.

It is said that one copy of the manuscript disappeared from a library, leaving behind only a wet trace on the wooden desk.

水水水

23

Further Research

Inspired by Lùn-Wén's dissolving lines, later thinkers pursued their own questions:

If the manuscript vanished, did it drown — or become a Submerged Daoist?
If truth flows, can it flow upward?
Which came first: the leak or the bucket?
If a boat leaks but no one notices, does it still leak?
Laozi and the Yellow Cat: two forms of a single Dao*?*
Can a Submerged Daoist walk on land? Or has he simply Flipped Over?
What is the ontological status of a wet trace on wood?

They say these questions, too, eventually disappeared, leaving only a faint sense of moisture in the air.

But that is the subject of a future treatise — one that will never be written.

水水水

24

The Science of the School of the Leaking Boat

Opening Section.

In no other science is the necessity of beginning from the matter itself, without preparatory reflections, felt so urgently as in the science of the School of the Leaking Boat.

In all other sciences, a distinction is drawn between the subject of study and the method of studying it; between knowledge and the object of knowledge. They demand the identification of a foundation, a ground, a lemma upon which thought may proceed.

But here — there is no ground, no foundation, no lemma.

There is only the River.
The River is pure — the Yangtze without further determination.
The Boat is new, freshly caulked, a simple equality with itself.
And yet the River flows, and the Boat flows.
Therefore, they are the same.

Truth consists in this: the river becomes the boat through leakage, and the boat becomes the river through sinking.

Truth is the leak.

From this, the following propositions unfold:

A boat without a leak is impossible.
If a boat does not leak, it does not move.
If a boat moves, it leaks.
If a boat sinks, it becomes the river.
If a boat becomes the river, the river becomes the boat.
If the boat disappears, only truth remains.
But what does it mean to remain within truth?

They say the Submerged Daoists know the answer, but they never speak.

They say the Yellow Cat knows, but he only sleeps in the sun.

And Master Zhì?

They say he ceased teaching and sank to the bottom of the Yangtze.

But the boat still leaks.

25

On the Transition

(in memory of the great Master Lǎ Gē, 黑格爾*)*

They say that one day, Master Zhì spent many hours reading an ancient treatise written by the great teacher Lǎ Gē. He studied each line with care, tracing the intricate transitions of thought, observing the subtle links between concepts. The students saw him turning pages slowly, frowning, then smiling, then frowning again.

By morning, the treatise was floating down the Yangtze.

"Master!" one of the students cried. "Why did you cast such a wise book into the river? It explains everything!"

Zhì looked at the water, then at the student, then back at the water.

"Don't you see?" he said. "It doesn't sink. It floats."

"But why?"

"Because it is true."

The students exchanged glances.

One of them, bolder than the rest, asked:

"And if it had sunk?"

Zhì smiled.

"Then it would have been even truer."

They say that after these words, some students continued studying the treatise.

Others stopped reading altogether.

And one walked into the river and never returned.

But sometimes, when the rains have passed and the Yangtze runs high,

you can see fragments of a weathered manuscript drifting along the current.

And if you look closely, you might make out faint, washed-out words:

"Truth is flow, and flow is truth."

水水水

26

The Enlightenments of Zhì

fragment 5 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

They say that when the philosopher Zhì was young, he attained enlightenment in a boat.

He was drifting down the Yangtze one quiet evening, the surface of the river smooth as a

mirror. The boat rocked gently on the light waves, and Zhì gazed into its wooden bottom, deep in thought.

"Where does the boat end and the water begin?" he asked himself.

He dipped his hand into the river and ran his fingers along the surface. The water slipped between them like something ungraspable, like a thought that escapes before it can be held.

Then he looked at the boat.

It moved with the river.

It was not still.

It did not exist apart from the water.

And in that moment he understood:

"The boat flows just like the water. The boat is also the river. And if the boat flows — then so do I."

He leaned over the edge and looked into his own reflection.

"If I flow, then I cannot be solid. Then I too am xūgòu*."*

The boat rocked gently.

And in that moment, the boundaries between himself, the boat, and the river dissolved.

He smiled.

They say that the next morning, the boat was found on the shore.

But Zhì was no longer in it.

And if you listen closely to the murmur of the river,

you might still hear the sound of Zhì laughing.

水水水

Years later, Master Zhì was old. His beard had gone white, his gaze was calm, his students came and drowned, and the river flowed, as it always had.

One day, he stepped once again into a boat and drifted downstream.

The water rippled.

The current carried him — slow, but certain.

And then a thought came:

"In youth, I saw that the boat was also the river. But what if I am the one who decides where the boat ends, where the river begins, and where Zhì is?"

He looked down at his hands, the boat, the smooth surface of the water.

"If I say the boat is the river, then it becomes the river.

If I say the water is the boat, then I am no longer in the river — I am still in the boat."

He laughed.

"And if I say that Zhì is not Zhì — then who is laughing?"

The boat continued to drift, and Zhì smiled as the world dissolved into water.

They say when the students found the boat, it was empty.

But on the wooden boards were faint traces of water —

as if someone had laughed for a very long time

before disappearing.

水水水

27

Who is Zhì?

fragment 6 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

“Master,” said the students, “if we ourselves decide where the boat ends and the river begins — can we not also decide that we are Zhì, and that Zhì is the bailer?”

Master Zhì looked at his students and smiled.

“Haven’t you already done that?”

The students looked at each other.

“But if we are Zhì, and Zhì is the bailer — then who is the boat?”

Zhì picked up a bucket, scooped some water, and poured it back into the river.

“What if the boat is also the bailer?”

“But the boat can’t bail water!” cried one student.

“Can’t it?” Zhì nodded toward the bottom of the boat, where water slowly, inevitably seeped out through a leak.

The students fell silent.

Then one of them, the most perceptive, said:

“So if the boat leaks, it too is bailing — not the water outward, but itself into the river.”

Zhì nodded.

“And if the boat bails itself into the river, then the river receives the boat. Which means…”

The student paused.

“…which means the river is also the bailer?”

Zhì laughed.

“Then tell me — which of us is Zhì?”

They say that after these words, one of the students became a boat, another walked into the river, and a third picked up a bucket and began to bail.

But no one could say who was who anymore.

水水水

“But then what is the point of all this?” asked the quietest student. “The leaking, the deciding, the bailing — if we can’t even say who we are… is there any meaning at all?”

Master Zhì looked at the quietest student, smiled, and said:

“Isn’t meaning itself *xūgòu*?”

The student frowned.

“But if meaning is *xūgòu*, then it can be created. But in that case…”

He stopped speaking.
Zhì nodded.

“If the boat leaks, it creates its own meaning — bailing.
If the boat sinks, it creates another — becoming the river.
If the river flows, it creates meaning by never stopping.”

The student thought for a long time.
“Then what meaning should I create for myself?”
“Haven’t you already?” asked Zhì.
“But I haven’t decided yet! I only asked a question!”
Zhì nodded.
“Then perhaps your meaning is to ask.”
The student thought even deeper.
“And if I stop asking — will my meaning vanish?”
Zhì smiled.
“If the boat stops leaking, does it become the river?
If the river stops flowing, does it become the boat?”
“But boat and river are one!” exclaimed the student. “Then meaning and non-meaning — are they also one?”
Zhì silently picked up the bucket, scooped water, and poured it back into the river.
“This is my answer.”

水水水

28

The Teaching of the Eternal Bailer

fragment 23 from the Lo-Huan Internal Canon

When the students asked him:
"Master, how is it that you have used the same bowl for ten years,
while ours crack and splinter every week?"
He answered:

"I do not bail water as you do.
I see the flow and merge with it.
I become both the Leak and the Current.
And so I move through water not with effort,
but with alignment.
The bowl becomes water, and the water becomes bowl.
When I raise the water, I ask the current to release a part of itself.
Then the Spirit of the Flow carries my hand,
and I no longer act — I follow."

In truth, the master used an iron bowl. The students had wooden ones.
But this did not diminish his wisdom.

Paradox of the Spirit of the Flow:

If the bowl is water, and water is bowl,
then who holds whom?
If the current causes leaking,
but only when a boat is present,
then does the boat create the current?
If the Eternal Bailer has become the flow,
then is it the bowl holding him — not the other way around?

The School of Lo-Huan drew the following conclusion:

Leakage exists only where something can *leak.*
The current itself does not know that it flows — but we do.
And that is why we laugh.

They say that when Master Zhì heard this conclusion, he smiled and poured his bowl back into the river.

They say that the Yellow Cat — the one who neither comes nor goes — opened one eye and looked at Master Zhì.

But what he understood — no one knows.

水水水

29

The Origins of the School of Submerged Daoists (Shuǐxià Dàojiā, 水下道家)

Historical-philological note on a textual deviation within the Lo-Huan corpus

One of the more obscure developments within the tradition of the School of the Leaking Boat (Lòu chuán xuéxiào, 漏船學校) can be traced to a minor editorial incident during the compilation of a treatise concerning the philosophical influence of the twenty-sixth disciple of Master Zhì on the trajectory of Confucianism during the so-called *Later Daoist Period*.

The treatise itself was complex and densely layered, as is typical of the Lo-Huan textual tradition. Graduate students working under the auspices of the Institute for Eastern Flow Philosophy undertook the task of copying commentaries, collating variant manuscripts, and reconstructing the doctrinal evolution of what was presumed to be a transitional synthesis between late Daoism and emerging Confucian currents.

At some point during this process, a single transcription error occurred.

The term for "late" (*wǎn*, 晚) was inadvertently replaced with "submerged" (*shuǐxià*, 水下), resulting in a formulation that referred not to *Late Daoists* but to *Submerged Daoists*.

This typographical deviation catalyzed the birth of an entirely new tradition.

Initially, the mistake went unnoticed. The revised edition of the treatise was published and enthusiastically received by scholars, who began to analyze the theoretical framework of the so-called *Submerged Daoists*, attempting to locate traces of this "school" in earlier texts, to re-interpret Master Zhì's sayings through a liquid lens, and to reframe Confucian rites in terms of immersion and fluidity.

Questions arose:

"Might early Confucians have practiced ritual submersion as a meditative technique?"

"Was Mencius in fact a covert Submerged Daoist?"

"Could the purification rituals be reinterpreted as exercises in breath control for underwater contemplation?"

As research proliferated, the School of Submerged Daoists became more real with each scholarly article.

Eventually, its existence was no longer disputed.

Ancient texts were "discovered" or re-read to support the paradigm. Passages such as:

"The Submerged Daoist does not resist the current — he becomes it."

“Truth is not found on the surface, but where the gaze cannot reach.”

were taken as canonical.

Some monastic communities began practicing advanced breath-holding meditations, claiming that true realization of the Dao arises in the liminal state between the last breath and drowning.

The graduate student who had made the initial error never confessed.

But it is said that he vanished soon after.

Rumors persist that he was seen walking along the riverbed of the Yangtze, in conversation with the Great Submerged Daoist.

But whether this is true remains uncertain.

As Master Zhì once said:

“If you are reading about this — you are already in the water.”

水水水

30

Has the “Treatise That Was Never Written” Been Found?

(*Jiangsu Daily News, March 10, 2025)*
Nanjing.

Fishermen along the banks of the Yangtze have discovered a mysterious scroll that, according to some scholars, may be a fragment of the legendary *Treatise That Was Never Written* — a long-lost

text attributed to the enigmatic School of the Leaking Boat (Lòu chuán xuéxiào).

The scroll bears almost no legible writing, aside from a few faint, blurred symbols. Most unusually, at its center is a damp spot that does not dry.

"I stared at it for a long time, and at some point, it felt like I was reading.
But if you ask me what it said — I couldn't tell you,"
said Professor Liang Shu of Nanjing Flow University.

Historians remain divided on the authenticity of the find.
Some argue it is too coincidental to be genuine.
Others believe that the very symbolic nature of its emergence speaks louder than provenance.

"If the treatise was never written, yet it has been found —
does that mean it exists?"
asks scholar Yu Meng.

The scroll has been transferred to the Institute for Ancient Texts for further analysis.
Eyewitnesses report that the spot where it was found remains subtly damp —
as if the Yangtze itself left a mark.

水水水

31

Zhì and the Stolen Table

One day, while drinking tea with his students, Master Zhì said:
"No ceremony can be held without a table."
That night, the students stole the table.
But in the morning, Zhì conducted the tea ceremony on the floor, as if nothing had changed.
The students were puzzled.
"Master, yesterday you said that no ceremony is possible without a table.
But today you perform it without one. How can that be?"
Zhì took a sip of tea and replied:

"Yesterday, it was impossible without a table.
Today — without the floor."

They say the students sat in silence for a long time.
Then they drank their tea.
And never stole tables again.

水水水

32

Major Currents within the Lo-Huan Tradition

(An Overview of Divergent Interpretative Schools)

Over time, the philosophical tradition of the *School of the Leaking Boat* (Lòu chuán xuéxiào, 漏船學校) fragmented into a number of interpretative lineages. Though they share a common source, the various schools differ significantly in their views on the nature of the boat, the flow, Master Zhì, and, most notably, the Cat.

1. The Boatmen School (船人派, Chuánrén pài)

This school maintains a strictly literalist interpretation.

For them, a boat is simply a boat, and a river is merely a river.

The *Submerged Daoists* are regarded as apocryphal, possibly the result of mistranslation or folklore.

Master Zhì is understood as a pragmatic boatman whose advice was misread as metaphysical doctrine.

Core tenet:

"Bail the water, don't philosophize."

2. The Leaking School (漏派, Lòu pài)

This flow-centric lineage affirms that all things are flow, and flow is all things.

Even the Submerged Daoist is considered a mode of flow.

The highest divinity is the *Fish Kūn*, a being that moves freely between air and water — the supreme emblem of transitional fluidity.

Adherents observe three daily rites of immersion into Flow.

Core tenet:

"To flow or not to flow — that's not the question."

3. The Mysterian School (玄派, Xuán pài)

Radically paradoxical and metaphysically dense, this school claims that all is simultaneously something and nothing.

Master Zhì both existed and did not.

The boat both floats and sinks.

The river flows and stands still.

Even *Chigoǔ* (虚构, fiction) is fiction.
Core tenet:

"If you've understood, you haven't understood."

4. The School of the One Who Comes and Does Not Leave (來不去派, Lái bù qù pài)

A direct counter to the *Mysterian School*, this lineage insists on the paradox of presence without departure.
The Cat comes, and does not go.
The boat has sunk, yet it floats.
Master Zhì has left, yet remains present.
Core tenet:

"Once the river enters you, you can never leave — because the river is no longer outside."

5. The Submerged Daoists (水下道家, Shuǐxià Dàojiā)

Perhaps the most reticent school, the Submerged Daoists reject all exegesis as superfluous.
They assert that nothing need be said, because all is already clear.
Their only recognized practice is silent immersion — breathing not encouraged.
Core tenet:

"If you wish to understand — hold your breath."

It is said that all five schools once gathered for a grand philosophical disputation.
The next morning, the boats were still moored to the shore.
But none of their owners remained.
And on the quiet surface of the river, a Yellow Cat was seen drifting.

水水水

The Bird of Sh-tosh (鵬什, Péngshén)

They say that one day, Master Zhì looked at the river and said:
“Well then… the river flows.”
But when he grew older, he looked again and muttered:
“Shtosh… the river still flows.”

And at that very moment, a Submerged Daoist climbed ashore and walked forward — like the legendary bird *Péng* (鵬), which soars through the skies for thousands of *lǐ* without pause!

When Péng flies — he thinks not of the earth.
When he swims — he thinks not of the sky.
When he becomes the fish Kūn *— he forgets he was ever a bird.*

But what if Péng neither soars nor sinks — what if he simply walks upriver... wearing boots?

Shtosh.

Then he becomes *the Bird of Sh-tosh (鵬什, Péngshén)* — a being that neither walks, nor flies, nor swims — and yet, somehow, continues to move.

They say Master Zhì once looked down at the faint trail of *Péngshén* in the water and said:

"If you've found footprints, but not the bird —
it means you're already on the way.
Shtosh."

水水水

34

Water in the Palm

A student once asked Master Zhì:

"Master, what is the purpose of our voyages in these boats? What are we searching for? And what will happen if we finally find it?"

Zhì scooped water into his palm and opened his fingers.

The water slipped through.

"If you ask," he said, "you are still holding."

"And if I find it?" the student pressed.

Zhì scooped water again. It streamed out the same.

"Then you will know—there was nothing to hold."

水水水

Emperor Ōu Péng once asked:

"How did you become a teacher, Zhì?"

Master Zhì smiled, lifted water with his hand, and watched it slip through his fingers.

"Like this," he said.

The Emperor frowned.

"But that is only water."

Zhì nodded.

"And what is a teacher, if not the same?"

水水水

One day, students approached Master Zhì, their faces scratched.

"Master," they complained,

"we tried to take the Cat onto the boat, hoping he would show us the true School of Lo-Huan."

Zhì nodded.

"That was wise."

"But he only scratched us and stayed on the shore!"

Zhì nodded again.

"That was also wise."

"But we wanted him to teach us!"

Zhì smiled.

“Didn’t he?”

水水水

35

The Yellow Cat Who Neither Comes Nor Goes

The students once again came to Master Zhì.

"Master, the Cat never boarded the boat," they said. "He simply lay down and fell asleep."

Zhì looked at the Cat. "That is wise."

"But we were waiting for him to do something."

"He did," said Zhì.

The students watched in silence as the Cat slept, curled beside the river. That day, the boat drifted off empty — and for the first time, no one asked why.

水水水

According to the School of the Leaking Boat, the Cat is not fixed within the structure of the Game but moves across it without being seen to move. He does not belong to either side, yet his presence is felt throughout. He does not act, yet nothing escapes his inclusion. He does not join the Game, yet the Game would not be whole without him.

He is not caught, yet never absent. Not summoned, yet already there.

The Cat is both the boat and the current. When he remains still, he flows. When you reach for him, he is gone. When you stop reaching, he has already arrived.

水水水

One student once asked, "If the Cat neither comes nor goes, where is he now?"

Zhì gestured toward the sleeping Cat. "Look," he said.

The student watched for a long time, then bowed.

水水水

"Why," asked the students, "does the Cat do nothing and still matter?"

Zhì pointed at the river. "Does the river do anything?"

"But the river flows," they said. "And the Cat merely lies there."

From that day on, the students began to study the Cat.

Some found revelation. Others, paradox. A few saw only a Cat.

They say that when he sleeps, he crosses through the Game. That when he yawns, he opens the path between worlds. That one day, he will vanish — and still be nowhere lost.

But above all, the Cat will never explain his own importance. One either understands this, or

continues the search.

水水水

36

Fundamental Tenets of the School of the Leaking Boat

(From the Commentary to the Treatise on Water and Truth, attributed to the Lo-Huan lineage)

According to the philosophical doctrine of the Leaking Boat, the fundamental nature of truth resembles a boat (船 *chuán*). However, no boat is ever truly flawless, for every vessel inherently contains a leak (漏 *lòu*). To assume one's boat is perfect is merely to overlook its inevitable leakage.

To float (浮 *fú*) means to consciously acknowledge the leak yet continue using the boat. Conversely, to sink (沉 *chén*) is either to deny the leak's existence or to resist its presence entirely by attempting to remain fixed in place. Thus arises the school's central axiom: "There is no other boat (无他船 *wú tā chuán*), yet you must proceed onward regardless."

From this arises the great paradox of Lo-Huan philosophy:

The one who is sinking yet still remains afloat is the Player.
The one who floats but is unaware of the leak is the Non-Seer.
The one who sees the leak clearly and nonetheless chooses to float is the Player.

Classical debates within the Lo-Huan School often revolve around profound questions:

If the boat symbolizes truth and truth inherently leaks, is stable truth possible at all? If there truly is no other boat, and yet the boat continues sinking, might truth itself be the very process of perpetually maintaining buoyancy despite inevitable descent? Furthermore, is it possible to neither float nor sink, or is such a state merely another form of fiction (虚构 *xūgòu*)?

Critics from the "School of the Great Rupture" (破界派 *Pò jiè pài*) challenge this perspective sharply:

"You float—but for what purpose? One must break the boat and surrender to the ocean itself!"

To which the Leaking Boat tradition calmly replies:

"You may shatter the boat, yet you remain in water nonetheless. Better to embrace the boat as it truly is."

Once Master Zhì remarked succinctly:

"You know your boat leaks. Thus, you are already saved."

Laughter as an Epistemological Category: The Problem of Truth-Fixation within Lo-Huan Philosophy

Lún Wén (2025). Questions in Analytic Philosophy: Fixation, Fluidity, and the Epistemology of Laughter. *Journal of Metaphysical Incoherence*, Vol. 42, No. 1, pp. 17–56.
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1. Introduction: The Problem of Laughter in Cognitive Epistemology

The phenomenon of laughter is traditionally addressed within the psychology of perception (Morreall, 1983) and philosophical treatments of humor (Bergson, 1900). However, within the philosophical framework of the Lo-Huan school, laughter acquires a unique metaphysical status, directly related to the problem of truth fixation.

This central issue can be formalized as follows:

$$\forall x \, (I(x) \rightarrow \neg F(x))$$

Let *I(x)* represent the continuous flow of truth, and *F(x)* its fixation or stabilization. Within this schema, if something is genuinely true, its fixation inevitably compromises its inherent fluidity. Two immediate logical consequences follow: first, that laughter, when fixed or defined rigidly, ceases to be laughter; second, that truth, when fixed in a static form, ceases to be truth.

Thus, laughter and truth share an isomorphic structure, positioning laughter as an epistemological phenomenon inherently connected with the dissolution of fixed cognitive structures.

2. Laughter and Phenomenological Fluidity

From a phenomenological perspective, laughter may be defined as the consciousness's spontaneous response to a cognitive encounter between fixed structure and its sudden dissolution.

$$S = \lim_{F(x) \to 0} f(x)$$

If we represent the cognitive process of meaning fixation by the function *f(x)*, laughter can be expressed thus: The emergence of laughter (*S*) is inversely proportional to the degree of semantic fixation (*F(x)*). Hence, maximal laughter emerges precisely at the point of fixation's complete collapse. This elucidates laughter's pivotal position within Lo-Huan philosophy: If truth is inherently fluid, laughter becomes unavoidable; yet if laughter itself is subjected to fixation, it inevitably loses its disruptive potential.

$$\forall x \left(S(x) \rightarrow \neg D(x) \right)$$

We can therefore propose the following epistemological principle of laughter within Lo-Huan thought: The magnitude of laughter (*S(x)*) directly corresponds to the disintegration of conceptual determinacy (*D(x)*).

3. Laughter and the Theory of Chaotic Cognition

Analogous to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle in quantum mechanics—asserting that precise measurement of one property inevitably introduces uncertainty in another—a similar epistemological uncertainty may be applied to laughter. In this formulation, laughter's intensity (*S*) inversely corresponds to the rigidity or seriousness (*M*) of the cognitive structure involved. The more rigid and serious the conceptual system, the greater the intensity of potential laughter upon its subversion.

$$\Delta S \cdot \Delta M \geq \hbar$$

Thus, we obtain an interpretive principle: rigid conceptual systems give rise to profound laughter when their structures are destabilized. Conversely, systems characterized by fluid or weak conceptual fixation produce comparatively little laughter upon disruption. This insight clarifies

why laughter, within Lo-Huan philosophy, is regarded as an essential companion of epistemological instability.

4. Conclusion: Laughter as Metaphysical Noise

The preceding discussion allows us to conclude that laughter transcends mere emotional reaction, emerging instead as a fundamental epistemological mechanism—a rupture in the fixation of meaning itself.

Within Lo-Huan philosophy, laughter functions as a kind of "metaphysical noise," preventing truth from crystallizing into rigid forms. Everything subjected to fixation loses its inherent fluidity; yet that which laughs resists fixation altogether.

$$\forall x \left(T(x) \rightarrow S(x) \right)$$

Hence, we arrive at the final formula of laughter according to the Lo-Huan philosophical tradition: The continuity or flux of truth ($T(x)$) directly necessitates laughter ($S(x)$), and laughter itself maintains truth's fluidity.

水水水

38

Stories of the Great Master Zhì

Once a disciple asked Master Zhì:

"Master, if a boat flips upside down but air remains trapped inside, has the person within drowned, or are they still floating?"

Zhì smiled gently and replied, "It depends on who is asking."

The disciple persisted, "And what if no one asks?"

Zhì nodded slowly and said, "Then the boat simply continues leaking."

It is said that, afterward, the disciple deliberately flipped his own boat over, though he never revealed what he had understood from the Master's words.

水水水

Once Emperor Ōu Péng asked Zhì:

"What becomes of the one who has reached the end of the Way?"

Zhì quietly poured water into a cup, lifted it slowly, then gently returned the water to the river.

"They return to the Great Cycle."

"So then, will they begin the journey anew?" asked the emperor.

Zhì nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes—if they realize that the journey never ceased."

They say that the emperor stood silently by the river for a long time after that, asking nothing further.

水水水

One day, the disciples realized the Cat Who Neither Comes Nor Goes had disappeared. Alarmed, they approached Master Zhì:

"Master, the Cat is no longer here!"

Zhì nodded calmly.

"That is wise."

"But Master, we thought he would always be here!"

Zhì pointed to the place where the Cat usually slept.

"Has he really gone?"

The disciples stared intently at the empty spot for a long time, and finally nodded in understanding.

At that very moment, the Cat reappeared.

水水水

Emperor Ōu Péng proudly proclaimed to Master Zhì one day:

"I have built a boat that never leaks!"

Zhì looked at him curiously and asked:

"And how does it float?"

The emperor frowned slightly.

"It is far too large and valuable; made from gold and precious wood. Of course, I cannot risk placing it on the water!"

Zhì smiled knowingly and replied:

"Then, Your Majesty, what you have built is not a boat at all—but the shore itself."

It is said that, from that day forward, Ōu Péng never again built boats. Instead, he often sat quietly by the riverbank, watching others float gently by.

水水水

Emperor Ōu Péng once approached Master Zhì with a profound question:

"Master, which matters more—the current or the boat?"

Zhì replied softly:

"The current."

The Emperor frowned slightly and protested:

"But without a boat, there is no one to float!"

Zhì smiled and nodded gently:

"Then the boat."

Emperor Ōu Péng sighed in exasperation:

"But a boat without current remains forever still!"

Zhì considered this carefully, then simply said:

"Sthosh."

The Emperor fell silent.

It is said that, in this quiet moment, Emperor Ōu Péng truly saw the river for the first time.

水水水

Once, Master Zhì stepped into a boat and drifted quietly down the Yangtze River. He traveled far beyond familiar waters, reaching a place no one had ever visited.

Suddenly, from the water emerged the Great Submerged Daoist, who spoke to him:

"Zhì, have you come seeking me?"

Zhì pondered for a moment, then replied:

"Or perhaps it was you who sought me?"

It is said that, upon hearing this, the Submerged Daoist smiled gently, returning without a word beneath the surface.

Master Zhì quietly turned the boat around and floated back the way he had come.

水水水

39

When the Yangtze River Froze Over

Once, the Yangtze River became covered with ice. The disciples grew anxious and hurried to Master Zhì:

“Master! The river no longer flows! What should we do?”

Zhì calmly gazed at the frozen river and asked softly, “Are you certain the river has ceased to flow?”

“Yes, Master! The water is frozen solid, and the current has vanished!”

Master Zhì silently stepped forward, placing his foot firmly upon the ice, and said simply:

“Then let us walk.”

They walked steadily onward for some time, until at last Master Zhì turned and addressed his disciples again:

“Why did you deceive me? We are still flowing, and the current has not vanished at all!”

And when spring came, the ice melted away, and the river flowed on, as though nothing had ever happened.

水水水

40

What Happened to the Submerged Daoists When the Yangtze Froze?

When the Yangtze River froze solid, the disciples were greatly troubled and approached Master Zhì with concern:

"Master, what has become of the Submerged Daoists? There is no water now!"

Zhì studied the ice quietly, then looked back at the anxious disciples.

"If the river is frozen, does that mean the water has disappeared?"

The disciples considered this carefully, then answered:

"No, Master. It has merely changed its form."

Zhì nodded slowly.

"Then neither have the Submerged Daoists disappeared."

"But where are they, Master?"

Zhì gently tapped his staff against the ice.

"Listen carefully."

The disciples became silent. Beneath the ice, far below, they heard a faint, distant bubbling sound.

Thus it is said, the Submerged Daoists never vanished; they merely waited quietly beneath the ice until spring returned.

水水水

41

Excerpt from the Monograph

"Philosophy of the Leaking Boat: The Concept of Leakage and the Rejection of Fixation" (Lùn Wén, ed. 1977, pp. 563–570)

598. The Boat as a Metaphor for Thought

The philosophy of the Leaking Boat School (漏船学派, Lòu chuán xuéxiào) does not propose a fixed system but instead, adhering to the tradition of radical Qigouism (虚构主义, Xūgòu zhǔyì), conceptualizes leakage as a fundamental principle, not merely physically but epistemologically. As Zhuangzi famously remarks:

"If you tie a boat, it will not sink; yet it ceases to be a boat, becoming instead a bridge."

Thus, the concept of a leaking boat stands opposed equally to rigid doctrines and to the complete dissolution of meaning. Unlike traditional philosophical systems aiming at fixation (caulking), the Lòu chuán xuéxiào embraces the inevitable leakage of knowledge and identity as the very foundation of thought itself.

599. The Problem of Fixation and the Question of the Submerged Daoists

Considering the interplay between fixation and flow, an essential question emerges: if everything sinks, what then remains?

The Lòu chuán xuéxiào responds paradoxically:

Only that which resists will sink.

Hence arises the enigmatic figure of the Submerged Daoist (水下道家, Shuǐxià Dàojiā)—one who has ceased to differentiate between surface and depth.

Historical references to the Submerged Daoists are scarce. Some scholars suggest their texts never actually existed, having been carried away by the current. Yet hints appear in later Daoist manuscripts:

> *"When a book falls into the water, what remains?*
> *One seeks a new scroll;*
> *Another studies the flow;*
> *Yet another already breathes beneath the waves."*
> (Baopuzi, 3rd century CE)

600. Lòu chuán xuéxiào as a Metaphysical Metagame

Certain contemporary philosophers (see *Introduction to the Philosophy of Metagame*, 2025) propose viewing the Lòu chuán xuéxiào as a distinct form of metaphysical metagame, wherein:

The boat is a system of knowledge, inevitably leaking.
The water is reality itself, always slipping away.
The player is one who recognizes that he or she is already afloat.

In such an approach, truth ceases to be an object, instead becoming dynamic. Here, the significance lies not in a final answer, but rather in the very process of losing and recognizing that loss.

It is said that one who comprehends the teachings of Lòu chuán xuéxiào no longer seeks truth, but rather observes it gently flow away.

水水水

42

Stories of Emperor Ou Peng (欧朋, Ōu Péng)

One day Ou Peng asked Master Zhì:

"Master, what is truth?"

Zhì poured water into a cup and handed it to the Emperor, saying gently:

"This."

Ou Peng looked into the cup and frowned, perplexed:

"But this is just water."

Zhì smiled quietly:

"When you drink it, it becomes you; if you spill it, it becomes the river; and when you forget it, it becomes nothing at all."

Ou Peng remained silent for a long while, then drank the water.

It is said that after this, he summoned many chemists and ordered them to write countless treatises about water. But after reading all of them carefully, he still could not understand what he had actually drunk.

水水水

Emperor Ou Peng was wise, yet he still yearned to grasp the essence of the Game.

Once he approached Master Zhì and asked earnestly:

"Master, what is the Game?"

Zhì silently picked up a stone and threw it into the river:

"This."

Ou Peng frowned again:

"But the stone simply sank."

Zhì nodded:

"That means it lost."

It is said that Ou Peng sat for a long time by the river, thoughtfully throwing stones into the water.

Eventually, he smiled gently and stopped throwing altogether.

水水水

43

Emperor Ou Peng and the Scientific Study of the Flow

Once Emperor Ou Peng resolved to scientifically grasp the nature of the River's Flow.

He summoned the greatest mathematicians of the Empire and commanded:

"You must derive an equation that explains the river's current!"

For years the scholars labored, filling scrolls with complex formulas, drawing graphs, and constructing intricate models. All the Emperor's supercomputers were tasked with processing these calculations.

Finally, they presented Emperor Ou Peng with the Scroll of the Great Formula of Flow.

Ou Peng took the scroll, gazed thoughtfully upon it, then looked at the flowing river, then at Master Zhì—and immediately tossed into the water.[2]

水水水

44

Ou Peng and the Inquiry into the Cat

Emperor Ou Peng was a man of science. He diligently studied all that he could, disliking anything inexplicable.

Above all, he was perplexed and irritated by Master Zhì's Cat—known as the Cat Who Neither Comes nor Goes (猫无来去, Māo wú lái qù).

Determined, Ou Peng sought to unravel the Cat's mystery.

水水水

45

The Cat's Golden Ratio

First, the Emperor summoned mathematical scholars:

"Measure the Cat! Determine its perfect proportions!"

They meticulously measured whiskers, paws, and tail—and were astounded:

The Cat precisely matched the golden ratio (1.618) in every dimension.

Yet the moment these numbers were written down, the Cat yawned lazily, stretched its body—and all the proportions suddenly changed.

It is said that afterward the mathematicians quietly left the Imperial Palace, retreating to Mount Fùzhì.

水水水

46

The Fractal Symmetry of the Cat

Not giving up, Ou Peng then called upon physicists:

"Examine the Cat's fur closely! Perhaps its structure obeys fractal symmetry!"

They magnified the fur by thousands of times and indeed discovered that each hair replicated the entire form of the Cat.

But the instant the Cat shook itself lightly, the fractals disappeared.

It is told that one physicist subsequently abandoned science and became a Daoist sage.

水水水

47

The Cat and Quantum Superposition

Still unsatisfied, Ou Peng summoned metaphysicians:

"The Cat neither comes nor goes... surely, it must exist in quantum superposition!"

They observed the Cat intently, carefully recorded its position, and noted every trajectory.

Yet, whenever they turned away, the Cat invariably appeared somewhere else entirely.

They say that after this, the scientists abandoned measurement altogether and began simply stroking the Cat instead.

Frustrated, the Emperor approached Master Zhì:

"Master, I have studied the Cat exhaustively. I measured, analyzed, and observed it. Yet still, it neither comes nor goes!"

Zhì glanced at the Cat.

The Cat merely yawned and curled up comfortably in the sun.

Zhì smiled gently:

"Then you have finally understood."

They say that after this, Emperor Ou Peng ceased his scientific inquiries.

Yet sometimes, if you gaze deeply at the Cat, you might notice its fur again forming subtle fractals.

水水水

48

At the End of His Days

In the twilight of his years, Emperor Ou Peng came once more to Master Zhì.

"Master," the Emperor began quietly, "I have studied everything. I've mastered the sciences, measured the Flow, unraveled the Cat, sought the Submerged Daoists. Yet still..."

He paused, looking pensively at the gentle, endless flow of the river.

"Still, what does it all mean?"

Master Zhì said nothing. He simply cupped water in his hand, letting it flow softly between his fingers.

"You've studied everything," he replied at last, "mastered the sciences, measured the Flow, unraveled the Cat, and sought the Submerged Daoists. Yet still you ask?"

Ou Peng silently watched as the water quietly slipped away, drop by drop.

They say when the Emperor vanished, all that remained in his palace was an open book and a small, wet mark upon the table.

水水水

49

The Teachings of Submerged Daoism

Daoists have long spoken of the "way of water" (水之道, Shuǐ zhī Dào), yet why has no one ever asked where this path might lead? If the boat inevitably leaks, must not the true Daoist follow it into the depths?

Perhaps the most radical Daoist is precisely the one unafraid of sinking, for he understands that nothing is fixed. Ancient texts allude to a "plunge into Dao," but perhaps these hints have been taken too literally—or maybe, on the contrary, not literally enough.

If the Submerged Daoists indeed existed, they must have created a unique breathing practice designed to dissolve the fixation on the self, merging seamlessly with the river's current. They likely adhered to the concept of *"no distinction between surface and bottom"*, rendering the question "Where are you?" entirely meaningless.

Their connection to Lòu chuán xuéxiào (漏船学派, the School of the Leaking Boat) is clear. If truth inevitably leaks, the seeker who desires to grasp it must sink deeper, and if every boat is bound to sink, genuine wisdom must involve learning to exist submerged. A Daoist who realizes there is no difference between air and water thus becomes a Metaplayer of the Submerged Path.

The essential paradox of Submerged Daoism emerges clearly:

If you fear drowning, you'll never glimpse the bottom.
If you wish to breathe underwater, you must forget you are breathing.

Future historians will ask:

Why did the School of the Leaking Boat and Submerged Daoism emerge simultaneously?
If truth perpetually flows without fixation, does it mean that authentic texts of the Submerged Daoists will never surface, having been carried away by the current?
Above all, if philosophy sinks, has it reached its true state?

There is but one answer:

If the boat has finally submerged, it has found its rightful place.

They say that when Master Zhì once asked an Submerged Daoist, "Where are you?", all he heard was gentle bubbling.

They say the Yellow Cat once approached the river, gazing intently down—yet it was the water that gazed back at him.

They say that if you stare long enough into the river, eventually an Submerged Daoist will stare back at you.

水水水

50

Stories of the Submerged Daoists (水下道家, Shuǐxià Dàojiā)

One day a disciple asked Master Zhì:

"Master, how does one become an Submerged Daoist?"

Zhì simply pointed toward the river and said, "Go there."

The disciple stepped into the water and asked again: "And then?"

Zhì nodded gently and replied, "If you must ask, you have not become one yet."

水水水

Emperor Ou Peng (欧朋, Ōu Péng), upon hearing of the Submerged Daoists, set forth to seek them himself. He sailed the Yangtze for many days, diving beneath the surface, peering beneath boats, yet saw no one.

Returning to Master Zhì disappointed, he exclaimed:

"Master, I have sought the Submerged Daoists everywhere but found none. Does that mean they do not exist?"

Master Zhì calmly asked him, "Did you see anyone underwater?"

"No," said Ou Peng.

"Then," said Zhì softly, "that is precisely where they are."

They say the Emperor was silent for a long time, and eventually returned to the river. But this time, he did not seek.

水水水

The disciples asked Master Zhì:

"Master, if the Submerged Daoists exist, what texts do they study?"

Zhì wordlessly took a scroll and tossed it into the river.

The disciples cried out in dismay, "But the book will become ruined and lost!"

"Exactly," Master Zhì nodded.

水水水

Once a disciple inquired:

"Master, how does one become a Great Submerged Daoist?"

Zhì gazed serenely at the river.

"If you truly wish to become one—enter the water and never return."

The disciple stood hesitantly upon the shore for a long while, then finally stepped into the river. After some time he returned and said:

“Master, I was unable to remain underwater forever.”

Master Zhì nodded knowingly, “Then you are not yet ready.”

“But no one can stay underwater forever!” the disciple protested.

Zhì smiled softly, “That is precisely why you have never encountered them.”

It is said that, in that moment, the disciple finally realized that the Great Submerged Daoist is exactly the one who never returns. And he who keeps asking shall never become one.

水水水

One disciple spent long nights pondering the nature of the Submerged Daoists, yet he could never grasp their essence. He approached Master Zhì at last:

“Master, if the Submerged Daoists exist, why has no one ever seen them?”

Master Zhì pointed quietly toward the river, “And what becomes of those who remain in the water?”

The disciple reflected carefully, then answered, “They never return.”

Master Zhì nodded gently, “That is why you cannot see them.”

It is said the disciple stood on the riverbank for a very long time afterward, staring silently into the water, and never asked another question again.

水水水

51

Zhì and the Submerged Daoist

One day, Master Zhì said to his students:
"Today, I shall catch a Submerged Daoist."
The students laughed:
"But Master, Submerged Daoists elude everyone!"

Zhì silently took a net and threw it into the river.
A short while later, to everyone's surprise, a Daoist was caught in the net!
"Master!" cried the students, astonished, "You really caught a Daoist!"
But the Daoist simply sat smiling within the net.
Zhì looked thoughtfully at him and asked:

"Are you certain that it is I who have caught you, and not you who have caught me?"

The Submerged Daoist laughed.

水水水

52

Zhì, the Cat, and the Crucian Carp

The students noticed Master Zhì's Cat sitting quietly by the river, staring intently into the water.

"Master," they asked, "what is the Cat doing?"

Zhì replied:

"He is fishing for crucian carp."

A moment later, the Cat swiftly reached out his paw and caught the fish.

"Master," the students exclaimed, "does this mean the crucian carp was the answer?"

Zhì looked thoughtfully at the river.

"The carp was the answer because it was caught. But the true answer is the one that remains uncaught."

The students fell into silence.

They say that when the students looked again into the water, all they could see was the reflection of the moon.

水水水

53

Zhì and the Tea Ceremony

Once, Master Zhì was sitting with his students.

They placed their cups on the table.

Zhì frowned:

“Why do you place your cups on the table?”

“But Master,” the students replied, puzzled, “where else could we place them?”

Zhì took his own cup and placed it on the ground.

“Now, the ceremony cannot take place without the ground.”

The students placed their cups on the ground as well.

Zhì laughed softly.

“So, if the ground is taken away, does that mean the tea ceremony becomes impossible?”

水水水

54

Laughter and the Flow

Once the students asked Master Zhì:

"Master, why do you laugh?"

Zhì scooped water from the river, allowing it to run freely through his fingers.

"Why does the water flow?" he asked.

"Because it cannot stay in one place," replied the students.

Zhì nodded.

"Thus, laughter."

水水水

55

Zhì and the Zen Master

One day, a Zen Master asked Master Zhì:

"What is the sound of one hand clapping?"

Zhì silently took his cup of tea and emptied it into the river.

The Zen Master gazed at the flowing water and nodded appreciatively:

"You have understood Zen."

Zhì chuckled softly:

"Never have I heard such nonsense."

It is said that the Zen Master did not speak for three days afterward.

Zhì, however, continued to quietly drink his tea.

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Philosophical analysis of the Koan “Zhì and the Sound of One Hand Clapping”

(from Lún Wén (2025). *Děkōngsīzào dìngxíng: Luò Chuán zhéxué jí zhēnlǐ tǐxì de pīpàn – Deconstruction of Fixation: Philosophy of Lòu Chuán and the Critique of Systematic Approaches to Truth.* Academia Fluctuans, Beijing-Shanghai: Institute of Flowing Thought, p. 287–290. ISBN: 978-5-98765-432-1.)

1. Introduction: The Koan as an Epistemological Tool

The question “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” is traditionally considered in Zen Buddhism as a koan—a paradoxical construct whose purpose is to dismantle dualistic perception and stimulate an immediate awareness of reality beyond categorical structures of language and logic (Suzuki, 1957). The classical Zen interpretation asserts that a koan’s resolution is not expressible through discursive terms, instead manifesting itself at the level of direct action or lived experience (Heine, 2000). However, the response of Master Zhì transcends the traditional Buddhist framework, demonstrating the kind of meta-epistemological shift characteristic of the philosophy of the Leaking Boat School (*Lòu Chuán Xuéxiào*, 漏船学派).

2. Analysis of Zhì’s Response: Pouring out Tea as a Refusal of Fixation

Contrary to the traditional expectations of Zen interpretation, Zhì does not answer verbally; rather, he performs a gesture—pouring his cup of tea into the river. This action can be interpreted as follows:

It undermines the question itself, since action does not imply interpretation.

It demonstrates the unfixed nature of phenomena: water in the cup is form, but its loss does not imply the disappearance of water itself.

It deliberately ignores the very context of the koan, thus re-examining the Zen tradition itself.

The Zen Master, observing Zhì’s gesture, interprets it as an “understanding of Zen.” This gives rise to a fundamental epistemological mistake:

Zhì does not “answer” the koan—he simply acts.

The Zen Master projects onto Zhì’s action his own interpretation.

This corresponds precisely to the critique of fixation conducted by the Leaking Boat School: if a recipient attaches meaning to an action, they lose the fluidity inherent in perception.

3. Denial of Interpretation: In What Consists the "Nonsense"?

"I have never heard greater nonsense," Zhì responds.

This phrase undermines the very possibility of interpreting Zhì's action as either "understanding" or "misunderstanding" Zen. In doing so, Zhì:

Refuses to fix meaning, even within the context of negating meaning.
Accepts neither the interpretation nor the very structure of the koan.
Dismantles the game initiated by the Zen Master.

Here, we must recall one of the central principles of the Leaking Boat School:

"If you fix the flow, it disappears. If you fix the absence of flow, you have fixed fixation."

The Zen Master attempts to create fixation, even if it is a fixation aimed at "destroying fixation." Zhì does not participate in this game. It is this position that constitutes the radical stance of the Leaking Boat School: a refusal not only of systematic frameworks but of the logic behind their dismantlement.

4. Conclusion: Who is the Player?

We can outline the metagame structure of this situation as follows:

The Zen Master initiates a game (koan) and expects Zhì to engage with it.
Zhì performs an action that can be interpreted within the game's boundaries, yet consciously refrains from playing.
The Zen Master declares Zhì a winner, yet Zhì refuses the game's premise itself.

Therefore, Zhì is not the Player. Yet, if he is not the Player, the game was only the Zen Master's. Does this mean the Zen Master was playing alone? If the koan is designed to dismantle concepts, Zhì dismantles the koan itself. If Zen requires transcending thought, Zhì transcends the act of transcendence itself.

This illustrates the Leaking Boat School's core epistemological stance:

"Truth does not require fixation. The flowing of truth is truth itself."

Thus, the final epistemological paradox emerges clearly: by ignoring the game, Zhì becomes its meta-player; by dismantling fixation, he embodies radical fluidity itself.

References:

1. Suzuki, D.T. (1957). *Zen Buddhism and Its Influence on Japanese Culture.*
2. Heine, S. (2000). *Shifting Shape, Shaping Text: Philosophy and Folklore in the Fox Koan.*

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Zhì and the Great Daoist

One day, a renowned Daoist master visited Zhì and declared:

"You call yourself a Daoist, but your philosophy is empty! The great sages taught us to follow the Dao, yet you teach people how to sink!"

Zhì calmly poured a cup of tea and handed it to him.

"Drink."

The Daoist master drank the tea.

"It tastes good, but what does this prove?" he asked.

Zhì smiled:

"If the cup were full, you couldn't drink."

"So?" the Daoist persisted.

"And if the river were completely full, where would you sail?"

They say the Daoist master returned to his mountains. Yet, from that day onward, his students paid closer attention to the river's flow.

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Zhì and the Confucian Scholar

A well-known Confucian scholar once came to Zhì.

“Master, you reject order, but without order society collapses! Don’t traditions matter to you?”

Zhì nodded and asked:

“Which traditions do you consider most important?”

“The rituals!” answered the Confucian confidently.

Zhì took a cup and turned it upside down.

“Can you perform a tea ceremony now?”

“No, because you’ve destroyed the order!” said the scholar indignantly.

Zhì calmly flipped the cup right-side up.

“Has order been restored?”

The Confucian fell silent, deep in thought. It is said that after this encounter, he was quiet for a long time before finally leaving.

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The Great Debate About the River

Once, a Confucian scholar and a Daoist were debating before Zhì.

The Confucian said:

"Traditions are the banks that keep society from collapse."

The Daoist countered:

"Only by following the Dao can water flow without obstruction!"

Zhì looked toward the river and remarked:

"But the river is present even where there are no banks. And even where there is no flow."

Both Confucian and Daoist frowned.

"How is that possible?"

Zhì took a cup, scooped water from the river, and poured it back.

They say the debaters never fully grasped his answer—but from that day onward, they stopped arguing.

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Zhì and the Reversed River

One day, Emperor Ou Peng declared:

"I will reverse the flow of the Yangtze. Let it run upstream!"

He built dams, installed machines, and redirected the riverbed.

And the river truly began to flow in the opposite direction.

Zhì looked and said:

"You have changed the river, but remained in the same direction".

"How so?"

"Because now you're drifting downstream in a river that flows upstream".

They say that at that moment, the river returned to its original course.

And Ou Peng began to study recursive thinking.

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Zhì and the Ice Bowl

One day, the students wanted to give Zhì the perfect tea bowl.

They carved it from pure ice.

“Master, this is the perfect bowl!”

Zhì poured tea into it.

It quickly melted and water spilled away.

Zhì nodded:

“Yes. Perfect.”

They say that after that, the students began carving bowls out of water.

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Afterword

The only haiku ever written by Master Zhì goes like this:

truth flows
silently and softly —
like the river under the full moon
a Cat is sneaking
真理流淌
寂静无声
如满月之河
猫悄然潜行

If we speak of the School of the Leaking Boat (Lòu chuán xuéxiào), it means it already exists. But not because we created it—it has always been a possibility, awaiting its moment to manifest.

Truth reveals itself through us, yet is never exhausted by us.
We don't create it—we allow it to appear.
We don't limit it—we let it flow.
We don't hold onto it—for just like a boat, truth always leaks.
But if truth leaks, can it ever be fixed?

If someone writes a treatise about Lòu chuán xuéxiào, does it mean the truth is now fixed? Or is the treatise just another boat doomed to eventually sink? And if truth is flow, then what is the river itself?

The Great Paradox of Zhì:

You hold truth in your hand like water.
If you squeeze your fist, it slips away.
If you open your palm, it remains with you.
Truth reveals itself but is never fixed.

The School of the Leaking Boat always was, but now you've become aware of it.

By the way, we forgot to mention one important concept of the School:

LOL — Lòu chuán xuéxiào: Laughing Over Loss.
The boat is leaking? LOL
A Daoist went underwater? LOL
Historians debate whether the Leaking Boat School was real? LOL

If everything inevitably sinks, yet we keep laughing, we've already grasped the essence of Lòu chuán xuéxiào.

The Ultimate Paradox of the Submerged Daoists:

> *When the boat sinks, you have a choice—to drown with sadness, or to laugh. But the water never distinguishes who among you laughed.*

The Game continues! LOL

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Translator's Afterword

The Leaking Boat School (Lòu Chuán Xuéxiào, 漏船学派) represents a unique philosophical current focusing on concepts of fluidity, uncertainty, and impermanence. Its teachings are deeply rooted in the Taoist tradition, especially influenced by Laozi and Zhuangzi, yet it presents an original perspective on the nature of being and knowledge.

The main aspects of the philosophy of the Leaking Boat School can be summarized as follows:

Acceptance of Fluidity and Uncertainty:

Unlike traditional philosophical systems striving for fixed truths and stability, Lòu-Huán embraces fluidity and uncertainty as fundamental characteristics of reality. A leaking boat symbolizes human existence, inevitably subject to change and impermanence.

Rejection of Fixation and Rigid Structures:

Lòu-Huán philosophy rejects rigid structures and fixed doctrines, advocating instead for flexibility and adaptability. Knowledge and teachings are considered temporary and changeable rather than absolute truths.

The Metaphor of the Leaking Boat:

The leaking boat serves as the central metaphor in Lòu-Huán philosophy, representing the idea that attempts to attain absolute safety and stability are illusory. Instead, one must learn to navigate and exist within constant change and uncertainty.

The Submerged Daoists and the Concept of Hidden Knowledge:

The figure of the Submerged Daoist (Shuǐxià Dàojiā, 水下道家) symbolizes those fully integrated with life's current, relinquishing surface-level aspirations and ambitions. This highlights the value of hidden, implicit knowledge and wisdom, which resist simple observation or fixation.

Metagame and Philosophy as Process:

Lòu-Huán treats philosophy not as a set of dogmatic statements but as an ongoing process of exploration and play with ideas. In this approach, the very process of thinking and engaging with the world becomes more important than arriving at definitive conclusions or results.

In summary, the philosophy of the Leaking Boat School offers a profound and original view on the nature of reality, emphasizing the significance of fluidity, uncertainty, and the relinquishment of rigid structures in favor of flexibility and adaptability.

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Chapter 64

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Notes

The Bird of Sh-tosh (鵬什, Péngshén)

1 The etymological corruption of “sh-to-sh” from “well then” (什) has led to speculative interpretations within the Shuǐxià Dàojiā lineage, where linguistic hesitation is viewed as ontological pivot.

Emperor Ou Peng and the Scientific Study of the Flow

2 The commentator, however, does not clarify exactly who or what Ou Peng tossed into the river—Master Zhì, the scroll, or the mathematician.